

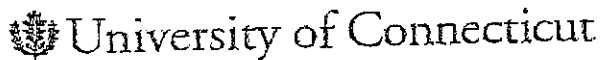
Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee
Public Hearing
Testimony
By
Philip E. Austin
Interim President
University of Connecticut

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to submit written testimony on Raised Bill 1026, *An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning a Public Agenda for Higher Education*, which implements the recommendations of the Committee's report entitled *Higher Education Governance*.

As the attached letter I sent to the Committee last month indicates, the University commends the Committee and its staff for its work on this issue and for acknowledging the importance of continuing UConn's current governance structure. Additionally, the letter highlights the University's support of state-wide strategic planning for public higher education. It also notes our concern not with performance-based assessments, but with performance-based incentive funding.

The University is heartened that Governor Malloy has also acknowledged the importance of maintaining the University's current governance model in his recent higher education reorganization plan. As part of his reorganization plan, the Governor retools the existing strategic planning process, currently under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education. As the legislative process continues, we urge the Committee to consider that model as it may achieve the same objectives of Raised Bill 1026.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your continued support of the University of Connecticut.



Ms. Carrie Vibert
Director
Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee
State Capitol
Room 506
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Ms. Vibert:

Thank you for providing the University with the opportunity to comment on the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee report on *Higher Education Governance Structure*. Overall, the University supports many of the report's findings and recommendations, including its recognition of the value of maintaining UConn's current governance structure and the need to enhance state-wide higher education planning efforts.

I commend the Committee and its staff for recognizing the critical role the University's Board of Trustees has played in enabling UConn to increase academic quality and diversity, fulfill its research mission and foster innovation and economic growth. This governance model, along with the tremendous investment of UCONN 2000 and the operational responsibility vested in the University, has transformed UConn over the past 15 years, helping it become New England's top-ranked public university and attain a consistent ranking among the top 30 public research universities nationally.

The University strongly endorses the concept of developing a public agenda for higher education and looks forward to furthering UConn's role and responsibility to meet identified state needs. Given the current global economic crisis, Connecticut must develop a strategic plan that creates jobs and sustains long-term economic growth. Connecticut's public colleges and universities already play a large role in this arena and can do even more in the future. UConn welcomes the opportunity to expand its activities in this area as we continue to address other state goals.

While most of the report's findings and recommendations are to be applauded, some omissions were apparent. The report did not acknowledge with any specificity (including data) UConn's tremendous accomplishments, or those of Connecticut's other units of our public higher education system, that have been achieved to date. At UConn, the transformation has been profound. Today, UConn is a school of choice for high-achieving students, successfully reversing Connecticut's brain drain and achieving other significant benchmarks. **Some important accomplishments since 1995 include:**

- ☐ Freshman Applications at all campuses increased 115% (9,874 to 22,142)
- ☐ Average freshmen SAT scores increased 108 points at Storrs (1113

- to 1221)
- ☐ Enrollment university-wide increased by more than 8,000 students, to over 30,000 today
- ☐ Minority freshmen enrollment increased 172% (308 or 15% to 838 or 25%)
- ☐ Fall 2003 average time to graduate of 4.2 years at Storrs ranks 5th among public research universities
- ☐ Undergraduate degrees awarded at all campuses increased 57% since fall 1995 (2,951 to 4,632)
- ☐ Graduate/Professional degrees awarded at all campuses increased 31% since fall 1995 (1,757 to 2,299)
- ☐ Private giving has nearly tripled

In addition to these achievements, UConn is contributing in other substantial ways to Connecticut's economy. UConn's ongoing operations add \$2.3 billion annually to our state's gross domestic product, are responsible for generating 29,000 jobs in the state, and increase the state's gross domestic product by \$5.05 for every state dollar allocated to UConn. Since 1996, annual faculty research awards have increased 137%, from \$98 million to \$233 million. Nationally renowned research programs in stem cell, fuel cell and nanotechnology have been developed and expanded. Enrollment and degrees awarded in key workforce shortage areas like engineering, life sciences and nursing have increased dramatically. In the last 12 years, UConn faculty have been responsible for 226 patents, starting 35 companies, and 97 active technology licenses. In 2009, our Technology Incubation Program hosted 18 companies at three campuses, and our incubator companies created 100 jobs and generated \$19.3 million in revenue.

I recognize that UConn's partnership with the state can and should be expanded. However, it is critical to provide policy makers not only with a plan on how to move forward but also with a complete picture of the contributions currently being made by our public institutions of higher education.

Regardless of how the path forward will be developed, it must be one that is determined with our participation and is transparent. The University's commitment to operational transparency is long-standing, and we currently make a broad range of financial, personnel and other operational information publicly available. This approach has enabled us to provide any additional information needed or requested by state policymakers.

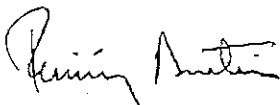
The University would like to raise a specific concern regarding the recommendation calling for the creation of performance-based incentive funding. While we welcome (and currently use) performance-based assessments, it will be problematic if a program of this type diverts funding from our current base appropriation. At a time when state support for public higher education may be reduced as part of the effort to address the historic fiscal challenges confronting our state, it will be difficult to implement this type of program without supplanting state funds that are being used to support academic and student services. Due to the state's fiscal condition, it already will be extremely challenging to maintain the quality and breadth of academic, residential and support services our students expect from a nationally competitive university. Additionally, since financial aid is primarily an institutional

responsibility in Connecticut, the diversion of additional dollars from our base appropriations could have severe repercussions not only on academic quality but also on student access.

As an alternative to performance-based incentive funding, the Committee should consider expanding an existing Department of Higher Education grant program which is successfully providing incentives to meet workforce needs. DHE's Education and Health Initiatives program -- which provides grant funding to public universities and colleges to address education and healthcare workforce shortages--has helped the University respond promptly to workforce needs in Nursing. Through a grant from this program, the University was able to do a market analysis, which became the impetus for the creation of accelerated Nursing programs that addresses this important workforce shortage in multiple communities throughout the state. The program currently operates at our Stamford, Waterbury and Avery Point campuses. The Connecticut State University System and the Community College System have also used this grant program to start similar programs in the education and healthcare professions. Expanding this grant program to one that addresses a broader range of identified state needs would likely yield similar if not better results than performance-based incentive funding models.

Thank you, again, for your good work and the opportunity to comment on the report. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Philip E. Austin".

Philip E. Austin